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Grace Lutheran Church, Uniondale, New York  
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*The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost Proper 9A – July 5, 2020  
Zechariah 9:9-12    Psalm 145:8-14    Romans 7:15-25a  
Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30*

*Grace to you and peace, from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. AMEN*

Jesus was exasperated with the crowd. He asked them: “To what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to one another, ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we wailed, and you did not mourn.’” (Matthew 11:16-17.)

We may feel like we’re part of the confused crowd these days: We stayed at home to keep COVID-19 in check, but the numbers of people who are ill, hospitalized and dying are going up in the country (even though it’s not happening here in New York), and that’s frightening and frustrating; it makes us angry. We want you to give us back our freedom of movement and our normal lives.

Jesus continued: “For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon’; the Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’” (Matthew 11:18-19b.)

Many people were outraged by yet one more murder of an unarmed Black man by a police officer. They took to the streets to protest peacefully, and many of them were told that they **weren’t doing it right**. they were corralled, like cattle. Some were thrown to the ground by police. So, some of the protesters turned to violence, and **they** were told that they **weren’t doing it right**; they were **arrested** and **charged** with significant crimes.

We may be “the generation” that doesn’t understand what’s happening today. There’s so much that we can’t understand. For instance, why is this virus here; why is it attacking us; why is it so infectious, even seemingly malicious?

For instance, why are the people who are least able to withstand it, the hardest hit? For instance, why, after hundreds of years in this country (with many of their

ancestors having been kidnapped and brought here against their will) are Black and Brown people still being treated as if their lives don't matter?

For instance, why are White people – even well-meaning ones – so blind to the injustice that pervades our society? Why are they so unwilling to take a stand and to put an end to it?

Even though we don't understand, Jesus has come to us, once again, with his words of welcome and acceptance. It's not a suggestion; it's not an invitation. No, it's a **command**: “**Come** to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. **Take** my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (11:28-30.)

This might sound like Jesus is taking us for a walk in the park, instead of living through the difficulties, the pain and the disappointment of life. But a more accurate translation for the word “easy” in the New Revised Standard Version of our text is “well-fitting,” “good” or “useful,” so that's why I used those adjectives when I read the Gospel text. That makes Jesus' promise a little more understandable.

A yoke is meant to help guide oxen so they can work well together. But if it's not well-fitting for both animals, it rubs against their necks and shoulders as they move. To keep from feeling the soreness, they walk crookedly and they bump into each other. Because of that, the wagon they're pulling doesn't move in a smooth, straight line. It might even get unbalanced and fall over – pulling the animals with it.

Jesus offers us a life lived through the guidance of a yoke that is designed individually for each of us. It's custom made, or in today's parlance, “bespoke.” So, the yoke of discipleship that Jesus calls us to is well-fitting for each of us. And Jesus, in the person of the Holy Spirit, is our partner in the yoke.

How do we hear Jesus today? Does his promise still give us hope? Hope that people will wear their masks and stop gathering together to play – because they seem to be unable to stop behaving like irresponsible children – so that the cases of COVID-19 will slow and – eventually – stop?

Hope that the continuing demonstrations throughout the country **this time** promise that White people **do**, finally “get it” and **will**, at last, demand that justice be done;

that police policies and procedures **will be changed** to make them less militaristic, less targeted, more even-handed?

Hope maybe, on the part of some police officers that they will no longer be made responsible for handling every social ill, for every person who's out of control, that no one else seems capable of managing, despite the fact that they've never received proper training or preparation.

Life doesn't become a perpetual vacation with this yoke. There's still lots of work to be done. There's discipline to be lived, like continuing to use the virus protection measures. Like being active in our community to reshape the way policing is carried out in our communities, and how we take care of people who are in need of special care or intervention for their own safety or that of others. Like making our opinions known about how to re-vamp our immigration laws so that people are welcomed to this country, not treated like invaders and repelled, sent back to live on the streets in Mexico. Like reforming our unjust system of "justice" to decrease the incarceration of millions of people so that all people can live full lives in peace with their families.

The Gospel is to be proclaimed. But with Jesus' tailor-made yoke, we can get through the work without injuring ourselves and then we can rest.

Jesus' yoke helps us to get free from the power of our sins and weaknesses. It's a hard thing to acknowledge that good, well-meaning, moral people can inhabit evil systems and can contribute to those systems and can be mal-formed by those systems. But that's the truth and that's the way life has turned out to be. But with discipleship we're not left to fight the temptations of sinful life alone. We can do what we want to do **as followers of Christ**, rather than finding ourselves in the midst of doing the sinful behavior that we don't want to do, like Paul remarked in his letter to the Romans.

But, in order for this to happen, we have to be disciples – we have to submit to Christ's discipline – for this to happen. The prophecy from Zechariah warns us that the king returning to Jerusalem was not to be the general who won the battle to restore Judean independence and the Davidic monarchy, overthrowing an oppressive foreign government. No, the king would be coming in peace, even though that wasn't what the Judeans expected or wanted. In our day, Jesus is not going to act according to our imaginations. Jesus already exists, regardless of how we imagine him. And he's going to be giving us instructions about how to live, so we'd best listen up and accept the challenge, if we hope to come out of the world's

current situation in a better condition than we now experience. But we aren't in a hopeless situation.

Because Jesus is our hope. So let's grasp on to our hope.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. **AMEN**